

Message Text

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FOR THE DIRECTOR; VOA; PGM/PP; PGM/DP PASS PROFESSOR
ROBERT LINDSAY

1. UNDER THE BANNER "MEET THE PRESS" THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF GHANA HELD ITS FIRST FULL PRESS CONFERENCE TODAY AUGUST 3 1978 AND ANNOUNCED A STRONG COMMITMENT TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FREE PRESS IN GHANA. IN AN EMOTION-PACKED ATMOSPHERE WITH OVER TWO HUNDERD GHANAIAAN AND FOREIGN JOURNALISTS PRESENT, IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION PRESS HALL IN ACCRA, COMMISSIONER FOR INFORMATION COLONEL PARKER YARNEY ANNOUNCED TO APPLAUSE AND CHEERS THE SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL'S ASSURANCE THAT HENCEFORTH SHORT OF SEDITION AND LIBEL EDITORS AND JOURNALISTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO CRITICIZE AND COMMENT ON ALL ASPECTS OF NATIONAL LIFE. IN MOVING TO ESTABLISH A FREE PRESS, COLONEL YARNEY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE GHANAIAAN PRESS HAS HAD DIFFICULTIES IMPOSED IN THE PAST BUT STRESSED THE NEW COMMITMENT TO THE GHANAIAAN AND INTERNATIONAL PRESS THAT FREE INQUIRY AND COMMENT WITHOUT THREAT OF REPRISALS IS THE FIRM POLICY OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF GHANA.

2. THE COMMISSIONER STATED THAT THE PRESS, WHETHER PRIVATE OR STATE-OWNED HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO FERRET OUT MINORITY VIEWS ON ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE NATION AND CHAMPION THE CAUSE THAT SEEM IN THE
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BEST INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE. HE ALSO CHALLENGED THE ASSEMBLED EDITORS AND CORRESPONDENTS TO PRACTICE INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM TO EXPOSE CORRUPT OFFICIALS AT ALL LEVELS OF THE SOCIETY AND PROMISED THE COOPERATION OF HIS MINISTRY IF OFFICIALS REFUSED TO ANUWER QUESTIONS. "EXPOSE WITHOUT FEAR THE EVILS THAT PLAGUE OUR SOCIETY," COLONEL YARNEY SAID. "ANY

PERSON WHETHER HIGH PLACED OR NOT WHO OBJECTS CAN TAKE HIS CASE TO THE COURTS."

3. HE CHALLENGED THE PRESS TO PLAY A PROMINENT ROLE IN INFORMING THE PEOPLE OF GHANA, DURING THIS TRANSITION PERIOD TO CIVILIAN RULE, OF THE FORMS OF GOVERNMENT THAT THEY MAY WISH TO SELECT.

4. DURING THE LENGTHY QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION THE COMMISSIONER REITERATED THAT IN THE FUTURE NO JOURNALIST WILL BE PENALIZED OR DETAINED FOR WHAT HE PRINTS OR DOES NOT PRINT. IN RESPONSE TO A DIRECT QUESTION COLONEL YARNEY AFFIRMED THAT THIS FREEDOM EXTENDS TO THE DISCRETIONARY RIGHT OF THE STATE-OWNED PRESS NOT TO PRINT GOVERNMENT POSITIONS. HE ALSO DECLARED THAT PRIVATE NEWSPAPERS WILL BE PERMITTED AND THAT NO NEWSPAPERS APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION WILL BE DENIED. IN THIS CONNECTION HE REPORTED THAT HE HAS YESTERDAY APPROVED ON THE SAME DAY IT WAS MADE AN APPLICATION BY GHANA BAR ASSOCIATION, ONE OF THE FORMER GOVERNMENT'S SEVEREST CRITICS, TO START A NEWSPAPER. IN RESPONSE TO A CHORUS OF CALLS FOR THE LICENSING DECREE THAT HE HAD BEEN USED IN THE PAST TO INTIMIDATE NEWSPAPERS TO BE REPEALED, THE COLONEL STATED HE WOULD CARRY THE PRESSES' FEELINGS TO THE SMC. HE ALSO HEARD CALLS FOR AN END TO THE PREVENTIVE DETENTION ACT AND PLEDGED TO CARRY THE UNCLASSIFIED

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MESSAGE TO THE SUPREME MILITARY GOVERNMENT.

5. THE COLONEL CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT THE PRESS HAS THE POWER TO HELP CURE THE NATION OF ITS ILLS, IF ONLY THE PRESS WILL REMAIN OBJECTIVE AND NOT ATTEMPT TO CURRY FAVOR WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. HE SAID: "YOU HAVE THE FREEDOM TO EXERCISE YOUR JOURNALISTIC PROFESSION WITHOUT FEAR. WE WILL ASSIST YOU IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE."

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